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Name of article: Public Library Buildings in Finland : An Analysis of the  
Architectural and Librarianship Discourses from 1945 to the Present  
Year of publication: 2011  
Name of journal: Library Trends  
Volume: 60  
Number of issue: 1  
Pages: 152-173  
ISSN: 0024-2594  
Discipline: Social sciences / Social policy  
Language: en  
School/Other Unit: Library

URN: <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:uta-3-619>

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# Public Library Buildings in Finland: an Analysis of the Architectural and Librarianship Discourses from 1945 to the Present

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## Abstract

The history of public library buildings in Finland from 1945 to the present is analyzed by examining the Finnish architectural and librarianship discourses on library planning and design. Two Finnish journals were chosen as the main research material: *Arkkitehti*, the main national publication for Finnish architects, and *Kirjastolehti*, the major publication for Finnish librarians. The key historical features of the architectural and librarianship discourses are presented within the wider context. A closer analysis of five representative library buildings is also presented. The specific architectural discourse on library design is found to have been largely determined by the changes in the Finnish architectural discourse in general; the representational conventions of a genre determined the way the library buildings were presented. The practical demands of library work have largely guided the Finnish librarianship discourse on library planning and design, but in many cases the discussion was also more progressive and future-oriented.

## Introduction

There has been growing interest in library architecture in recent years.<sup>1</sup> The study of library buildings and spaces has often been multidisciplinary in nature, covering the aesthetic, social, and cultural aspects of libraries. Nevertheless, the library as a building type remains a somewhat marginal research subject in the history of architecture. To some extent, the same can be said of library history, where other aspects of the institution have tended to dominate.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this article is to present an analysis of the history of public library buildings in Finland from 1945 to the present, by examining Finnish architectural and librarianship discourses on the subjects of library planning and design.<sup>3</sup> Two journals were chosen as the main research material: *Arkkitehti* (The Finnish Architectural Review), the main national publication for Finnish architects, and *Kirjastolehti* (The Finnish Library Journal), the major publication for Finnish librarians. In this article the official English titles of the journals will be used henceforth: *The Finnish Architectural Review* and *The Finnish Library Journal*. These two journals were chosen as they represent the differing interests of two groups of professionals that have played an essential, if diverse, role in the process of planning public libraries in Finland since World War II.

As Finland is sparsely populated (the population is currently about five and a half million), *The Finnish Architectural Review* and *The Finnish Library Journal* enjoy national status in their own respective subject areas; actually they have no serious competition in Finland. To a degree they share a common history in that both were founded at the beginning of the twentieth century. *The Finnish Architectural Review* is published by The Association of Finnish Architects, and *The Finnish Library Journal* by The Finnish Library Association. The journals are thus part and parcel of the history of the professional associations of Finnish architects and librarians and have played a fundamental role in establishing the identity of these two professions. Due to this national status, *The Finnish Architectural Review* and *The Finnish Library Journal* provide rich, essential source material for a historical study in the Finnish context. The analysis in this article is confined to the key historical features of the written discourses of Finnish architects and librarians.<sup>4</sup> Extensive quotation of original Finnish discourses has been avoided, as this would be of little use to the foreign reader. In addition,

the visual communication in *The Finnish Architectural Review* and *The Finnish Library Journal* was examined, including photographs and various architectural drawings. All necessary translations into English are either official or by the present author. Five public library buildings were chosen for more detailed analysis: the Lauritsala Public Library (1951), the Rovaniemi City Library (1965), the Kouvola City Library (1971), the Tampere City Library (1986), and the new extension to the Turku City Library (2007).

The discussion is divided into five sections: Introduction, The Early Decades, The Period of Standardization, The Further Developments, and Conclusion. The three central sections present a chronological history of public library buildings in Finland from 1945 to present, and all share the same inner structure: first a general description of the era in question, then a closer analysis of the main features of architectural and librarianship discourses, and finally, more detailed presentations of the selected public library buildings that are representative of that particular era.

## **The Early Decades**

Although the destruction caused by World War II was not as vast as in many other European countries, the economic situation in post-war Finland was constrained. Shortages of commodities, and of raw materials and other means of production were widespread. The reform of the public library system had to compete with the building of national infrastructure, housing, and other public institutions, including schools. The building, or to be more specific, the renovation of public libraries started quite soon after the war, at the end of the 1940s, but only gathered real momentum in the early 1950s.

Out of economic necessity, the library building projects in this early post-war period were often renovations of existing library premises and modest in scale. These libraries were usually located in buildings designed for other purposes, often merely occupying a few rooms in them. In many cases, the premises were simply rented. Clearly many of the building projects of this era were undertaken in full knowledge that they would provide only temporary solutions. Despite the modest material means available at the time, there is nevertheless a distinct feeling of optimism discernible in these projects. The idea of a “new start” can in many ways be seen to characterize the cultural atmosphere of the beginning of the post-war period in Finland.

In the Finnish architectural discourse, library architecture was a relatively marginal subject in the early decades after World War II. This is true at least from the perspective of *The Finnish Architectural Review*; before 1970, only five public libraries were presented in the journal: the Lauritsala Public Library (1951); the Kuopio City Library (1969); and three libraries designed by Alvar Aalto: the Säynätsalo Public Library (1953), the Rovaniemi City Library (1965), and the Seinäjoki City Library (1968). The main reason for publishing so few presentations of public libraries during this era must be that these projects were usually quite modest, often renovations of existing library premises. In addition, they were mainly local projects, designed by local architects or even just builders. The overall architectural quality of these libraries was apparently not considered interesting enough at the national level. It must be remembered that this was time when other, more important undertakings, on a grander scale, were available to Finnish architects, and the presentation of these projects was the first priority of a national architectural publication.<sup>5</sup>

As few examples of modern library buildings were publicized in the architectural press or, indeed, built in Finland, it is hardly surprising that the conception of a modern, contemporary public library was not particularly clear among Finnish architects at that time. This partly explains the success of different kinds of gallery solutions in the interiors of the libraries of this era, solutions more reminiscent of classical architecture than modern design. No doubt, the popularity of imitations of the sunken reading areas of Aalto's libraries until the 1970s can also be explained by the paucity of other examples of contemporary library architecture in Finland. Such phenomena prove that the main reference point for architects was the work of other architects, and that *The Finnish Architectural Review* played a crucial role in establishing the current conceptual idea of the public library.

If the architectural discourse on library planning and design was quite sparse in the early post-war period, the opposite was true of the librarianship discourse. The lack of proper, purpose-built building was seen among Finnish librarians as one of the greatest impediments to the renewal of the public library system.<sup>6</sup> In rural areas, especially, library spaces were frequently deemed inadequate.

At that time, a public library was in reality often a modest collection of books, managed part-time by a person with very little formal education. The library was often located in some kind of public building, like the local school, but might even operate in a private home. In smaller villages a “public library” might be just one locked bookcase, from which books could be borrowed perhaps once a week.<sup>7</sup>

The groundwork for the renewal of the Finnish public library system began in wartime. In two lengthy articles by an eminent librarian Mauno Kanninen in 1944 and 1945 in *The Finnish Library Journal*, various library design issues were discussed in some detail.<sup>8</sup> Kanninen served, for example, as the chief librarian of a branch library in Helsinki and later as the director of the State Library Office, and was among the most important actors in the history of Finnish librarianship involved in library building design. The two articles by Kanninen can be seen essentially as literature reviews based on various Scandinavian sources, mainly Danish and Swedish publications, summarizing their findings and adapting them to the Finnish context. The main idea was that the future plans in Finnish library design should be based on the most advanced international examples, hopefully even improving on them. According to Kanninen, it was for the librarians to understand the future demands of library work and communicate these to other parties involved in library planning, like the architects and the different governmental and municipal agencies.

During the twentieth century, some distinct periods can be identified in the history of public library planning, when the Finnish librarians worked hard to develop the concept of the public library building and to actively promote their ideas. In all these cases the inspiration and the background knowledge for innovation were sought outside Finland, in earlier times from the United States and after World War II mainly from other Nordic countries.<sup>9</sup> The period from the 1940s to the early 1950s can be seen as a very active period of development and Kanninen’s role in it was pivotal. He was directly involved with many library building projects as a professional adviser and wrote a book in 1953 that could be considered the first Finnish manual for library planning.<sup>10</sup>

About seventy presentations of new or renovated public libraries were published in *The Finnish Library Review* during the 1950s (Aaltonen, 2009, p. 543). The textual contents of these presentations were fairly homogenous, containing some kind of history of the library, stating when and how it was established, in what kind of localities it had previously operated, and how the present library design had been realized. The new library spaces were regularly described as “light” and “spacious,” compared to the old public libraries which were now viewed as “gloomy” and “inadequate.” The use of light colors and light natural wood was very typical in the library interiors of that time. Besides practicality, the comfort and beauty of the new library spaces were much appreciated by the librarians. In the librarianship discourse, the elegance of the library spaces was seen as a one of the most concrete and direct ways to raise the social status of the institution. As expenditure was constrained at that time, the proper ambience for library spaces was to be created by simple arrangements. The possible use of flowers, plants, works of art, and different kinds of book displays to elevate the ambience of the library was enthusiastically discussed by librarians. The heavy investment in facilities for children was also a novelty and set the tone for this era.<sup>11</sup> Many library projects presented in *The Finnish Library Journal* in the 1950s were designs for new or renovated children’s sections and the photographs of these spaces, filled with young library patrons, were somewhat iconographic during this period.

Besides offering the obvious information on the design and functions of the library, the articles of this era were manifestations of civic culture, containing detailed descriptions of the openings ceremonies of the libraries. This underlines the tremendous prestige that these projects enjoyed locally. The regional or local aspect was further emphasized by listing the local firms involved in the building process. The construction and even the design of public libraries in the early post-war Finland relied heavily on local resources.

The presentations of public libraries in *The Finnish Library Journal* were from half a page to several pages long, typically containing one black and white photograph usually showing the interior of the library, and occasionally the exterior. Longer articles on more important libraries might include several photographs and even architectural drawings, usually floor plans. Although the print quality was hardly spectacular and the images rather small, the illustrations convey the general ambience of these spaces fairly well.

The Lauritsala Public Library (1951) (**Figure 1**) was in many ways a remarkable building in

the Finnish context.<sup>12</sup> It was entirely purpose built at a time when nearly all other library designs were mere conversions or renovations of existing premises. The library's value was immediately recognized and in 1951 a presentation of it was published in both *The Finnish Architectural Review* and *The Finnish Library Journal*. In the librarians' context the Lauritsala library was seen as a much hoped-for model library, setting an example especially for smaller towns and rural settlements. Architects Martta and Ragnar Ypyä had also put to good use Mauno Kanninen's professional competence while designing the library and the cooperation between these two professions was hailed as exemplary in the pages of *The Finnish Library Journal*. The fact that a presentation of the library was also published in *The Finnish Architectural Review* confirms that the overall quality of the design was also approved in Finnish architect circles.

The Lauritsala Public Library is a fine example of the work of its designers, Martta and Ragnar Ypyä, an understated pursuit of harmony between overall design and detail. Like Aalto's libraries, the Lauritsala Public Library is a well thought out architectural whole and the architects, with Kanninen's help, designed the furniture especially for the building. One of the distinctive features of the architectural careers of the Ypyäs was their wide interest in visual design and they were never afraid to use narrative elements in their architectural expression. In the Lauritsala Public Library, this interest is primarily shown in the huge mural covering the entire back wall of the main space, presenting a stylized map of the world with different animal and human figures and entitled "Triumph of the Book." The children's section also had its own appropriate wall decorations.<sup>13</sup>

The Rovaniemi City Library (**Figure 2**) was designed by Alvar Aalto, possibly the most famous Finnish architect of all time.<sup>14</sup> Although the library was built in 1965, the architectural solution had many similarities with the Viipuri Library, the first public library building designed by Aalto and completed thirty years earlier, in 1935.<sup>15</sup> Similarities include the fixed bookshelves, architecturally integrated into the wall structures, thereby emphasizing their horizontality, the split-level floor solution, and the ingenious use of indirect natural light. It seems that the principles that Aalto discovered in the long design process for the Viipuri Library were decisive for all his later library solutions. The architectural value of the Viipuri Library has been internationally acknowledged. In the Finnish context, its greatest merit is perhaps that it provided a model for Finnish architects, showing that it is possible to design a public library building using only modernistic aesthetics. The Viipuri Library was also a showcase of total design, where the same architect designed both the building and the furniture. This is an ideal that later inspired many other Finnish architects in their own library projects.

The Rovaniemi City Library was chosen for this study because it provides perhaps the finest example of a public library designed by Aalto in Finland. The complexity of the program and the amount of floor space were quite exceptional for the time. The library is part of the civic cultural center of Rovaniemi, which also includes the city hall and a theater, also designed by Aalto. The substantial investment in the center can be seen symbolically as a kind of reconciliation for the destruction wrought by the war—the town of Rovaniemi was razed to the ground by the retreating German troops in 1944—and at a more concrete level as an act of novel active regional policy, a cornerstone of the Finnish welfare state project.

Aalto's great influence on Finnish public library design is indisputable. The general design principles of Aalto's "organic architecture"—the use of free forms, and of natural materials such as wood, red brick, and ceramic tiles; and the aim to carefully design the building to blend with its natural surroundings—have been widely emulated in Finnish architecture. In the specific context of library design, two things have been especially influential.

The first is the use of different kinds of split-level floor solutions.<sup>16</sup> In the Rovaniemi City Library these are the sunken areas for reading, called "wells" by Harrison (1969) and by Finnish librarians more dismissively as "book pits." Various split-level floor solutions can be found, for example, in the Savonlinna, Kuopio, Nokia, and Töölö libraries. Librarians' general attitude to these solutions was initially skeptical and subsequently downright critical.<sup>17</sup> Nowadays, however, there is a tendency to look on them more leniently as a part of the library architecture of the time, despite their certain impracticality.

The second influential design principle is the ingenious use of indirect natural light. This kind of natural lighting has been used in many libraries in Finland, not only to offer the much needed extra light, but also to enliven the general ambience of many library interiors, or to highlight certain chosen

areas for functional or aesthetic reasons. In Aalto libraries the ample, indirect natural light from skylights compensates for the overall “closeness” of the exterior walls and the lack of views to the outside. Such introspectiveness has determined to some extent the ambience of the interiors of many later Finnish public libraries.

### **The Period of Standardization**

The history of modern public library buildings since the end of the nineteenth century has been, at least to some extent, a quest for standard solutions, despite the changing architectural styles used. Objectives such as order, control, and efficiency are deeply ingrained in the existence of the library as an institution, requiring practices that are definable, repeatable, and standard.<sup>18</sup> This practical, regulated side of library work has in many cases been manifest, one way or another, in the physical forms of the libraries. However, the concept of standardization assumed a greatly increased, fundamentally more essential role in library planning only after World War II. In the Finnish context, this process of standardization can be divided into roughly two stages. The first, preliminary period came immediately after the war, when librarians especially became interested in developing different kinds of blueprints for library buildings and furniture. The second period of standardization occurred between the mid-1960s and the early-1980s when the planning of libraries became more officially regulated and the library spaces more homogenous.

In the Finnish architectural discourse, the concept of standardization was a rather complex issue in the context of library architecture. For example, the idea of a model library has perhaps never been explicitly articulated in the architectural discourse; the pursuit of individual architectural expression has presumably prevented this. However, in the 1970s certain design principles gained universal approval; for example, the library should preferably be a one-story building with all the spaces on the same level and the structural solution should enable the greatest possible flexibility for future use.<sup>19</sup> Such functional principles and arguments have prevailed ever since among Finnish architects, even when other, mainly aesthetic and cultural validations of library buildings have become more significant.

The emphasis on functionality and the idea of flexibility can be seen as a part of the wider architectural discourse.<sup>20</sup> In Finland, great changes occurred in the 1960s in the construction industry with the advent of prefabrication. The prefabricated elements were used especially in house building, where standardized methods were perhaps most actively developed. The ideals of structuralism were moreover internationally fashionable in architecture from the mid-1960s to the 1970s. In Finland, many younger architects especially were drawn to this new mode of architectural expression.

From the present perspective, it seems that the emphasis on functionality in library design reached its peak between the late-1960s and the early-1980s, after which standardization has mainly appeared in the general, functional layout of library buildings and in the possible use of standardized furniture. One reason, which has perhaps lessened the value of standardization in the eyes of the Finnish architects, is the fact that most of the library buildings presented in *The Finnish Architectural Review* are the results of architectural competitions, where the individuality of solutions has usually been valued most.

In the librarianship discourse, standardization was seen as a key concept to improve the general quality of library design in the early post-war period. In this preliminary stage, standardization was attempted by developing different kinds of blueprints for library spaces and furniture (Aaltonen, 2009, pp. 542–543). This kind of standardization was primarily seen as a way to ensure that the demands of modern library work were taken into account in the design of libraries. From the librarians’ perspective, it was a way for architects and other designers of libraries to benefit from the professional knowledge of librarians.

The second period of standardization proper in the library planning occurred between the mid-1960s and the early-1980s. This was the second time since the 1940s that Finnish librarians made a conscious effort to develop and update the concept of the public library design. As in the 1940s, it was to the other Nordic countries that conditions in Finland were mostly compared. In this process, the contribution of Veikko Junnila can be seen as crucial. Junnila, like Kanninen, was one of the most prolific writers on library planning among Finnish librarians. He served, for example, as a library inspector and was extensively involved, indeed in a very concrete way, with library planning and

construction in Finland.

In two articles in 1968 in *The Finnish Library Journal* Junnila addressed the prevailing situation in the Finnish library planning and especially dimensioning, the latter based on a Danish study.<sup>21</sup> Although some significant public libraries had been built in bigger cities, for example the Rovaniemi City Library, the situation in general did not look particularly good, according to Junnila. The average size of the new libraries, especially in the rural areas, was too small; what made things even worse was the fact that these spaces had in many cases been designed without the expertise of the librarians. Junnila's solution to these problems was that new, adequate norms for Finnish library buildings ought to be determined. During the 1970s and the early-1980s several research projects were accomplished, the problem of dimensioning being an acute question, especially in the 1970s. The first manuals for library planning in Finnish were also published at this time, Junnila participating in all of them. The planning of public libraries gradually developed into a more regulated, professional, and standardized practice.<sup>22</sup> The program of the public library, its primary functions, also acquired its present, standardized content. The introduction of music departments and mobile libraries were the two renewals after the mid-1960s that had perhaps the greatest impact on the public library system in Finland.

There was a dramatic change in the presentations of library buildings in *The Finnish Library Journal* after the mid 1970s. Only one annual overview of the new library buildings was published each year, instead of presentations of individual libraries. No longer was any written description attached to the libraries, only technical, numerical data was provided. Interestingly, a likely illustration of the library was now often a ground plan instead of a photograph, as had previously been the case. During the 1970s, these ground plans started to resemble each other more and more closely: a simple rectangle designed using an open plan, a circulation desk in the middle, and the free-standing bookcases around it in strict orthogonal patterns. The semantic illustration of the general design principles of the modular library from the 1960s had suddenly become the prevailing reality of the 1970s.

The changes in the representations of library buildings reflected changes in general attitudes to library planning, which had become a well-established, more officially regulated part of national cultural policy. During this era, there was also a gradual adjustment in the professional identity of librarians, who started to see their work more neutrally as the administration of resources, rather than as a part of public education with moral aspirations. The homogenization of the physical form of libraries reflected the more democratic distribution of library services. The increase in floor space made it possible not only to implement the open plan in the libraries of smaller towns and villages, but also to supply many of the services previously provided only in the bigger cities.

The Kouvola City Library (1971) (**Figure 3**), designed by the architect Juhani Kivikoski, is a splendid example of the new paradigm of library design introduced into the Finnish context in the late 1960s, namely, the modular library.<sup>23</sup> The public architectural competition for the Kouvola City Library was organized in 1969 and in it, for the first time in Finland, the concept of flexibility was introduced as perhaps the single most important functional principle in library design. Interestingly, the term “modular library” was not actually used in the competition documents; instead, the winning entry was described as being a good example of a “landscape library,” this expression obviously coming from the term “landscape office” (Mehtonen, 2008, p. 53; Aaltonen, 2009, p. 570). Evidently, the more familiar context for Finnish architects for using open plan was, at that time, office building architecture. All the main functions of the Kouvola City Library are located on one level using an open plan; free-standing bookcases are laid out in geometrical patterns according to the dimension of the module. The low ceiling height and the wall-to-wall carpet emphasize the horizontality of the overall design and increase the feeling of enclosure and introspection. The interior is clearly reminiscent of Aalto's Viipuri Library with the diffuse, indirect natural light from skylights and the nearly windowless exterior walls, but without the split-level floor solution, which was now considered, among the architects, too, to be impractical.

## Further Developments

It is difficult to sum up all the different aspects of Finnish library architecture from the 1980s to the present. Nonetheless, there are some features that may be regarded as characteristic. After the

uniformity due to the emphasis on the functional aspects of the libraries, the wider cultural, symbolic, and historical values of the library buildings have again been acknowledged. To some degree, this has meant the increasing individualization of library buildings and spaces, at least regarding their overall architectural and physical appearances.

While the physical forms of the libraries have become more varied, the organization of the actual library work or the use of the libraries has mainly involved the exploitation of standard solutions. One can even ask how much the ongoing automation and computerization, which have undeniably altered library work in many ways, have truly changed the primary functions of the public library or, especially, the possible organization of its physical space. This is true at least in the Finnish context, where the computerization of public libraries has been relatively smooth and, while sometimes requiring challenging practical rearrangements, has not generally caused substantial changes or restructurings in the overall layouts of the libraries.

In the Finnish architectural discourse, the competition for the Tampere City Library (see below) in 1978 can be regarded as a turning point. The jury of the competition came to the conclusion that it was not enough to design the public library to be functional, but that it was actually more important that its architectural character should symbolize the cultural role of the institution. "Dull, faceless, and unpoetic" library building could not fulfill this requirement, according to the jury. Ever since, the aesthetic, but also the cultural, and to some extent the historical, definitions of libraries have become more prominent in the Finnish architects' discourse on library architecture.

Through aesthetic definitions, the library buildings are treated by architects in quite an abstract manner. In this discourse libraries are described as consisting of different kinds of design elements, such as "volumes," "forms," and "shapes," and their relationships to each other. Furthermore, the aesthetic descriptions are mostly visual in nature. Such argumentation is clearly based on the actual architectural design process and the architects' approach to the design problem of the public library.<sup>24</sup> In this kind of discourse, the presentations of library buildings obviously differ little from those of other buildings published in the architectural press and are fundamentally guided by the conventions of the genre concerned.

Another aspect important in the architectural discourse since the 1980s is the library building's relationship to its surroundings. This relationship has largely been determined by the concept of cityscape. The architects' use of this concept has mainly reduced the library's contextual relationship to a visual and aesthetic problem to be solved by the use of proper scale, form, color, and building materials.<sup>25</sup> Due to this approach, the possible relationship between the public library and the community has tended to be expressed rather one-dimensionally in the architectural discourse.

Changes in the architectural discourse on library design were fundamentally linked to changes in architectural discourse generally in Finland in the late 1970s. Contemporary criticism was directed mainly at the ideology behind the industrialized, overly standardized building methods, which were now seen to create a built milieu that emphasized the importance of technological infrastructure but paid little attention to cultural or environmental values.<sup>26</sup> This criticism generated various demands for more meaningful architecture taking into consideration the symbolic dimension of the built environment and the local values.

In the librarianship discourse, there seems to have been no single, clearly formulated agenda on library buildings from the 1980s onward. On the contrary, the public library building has come to be regarded as highly complex with multiple social and cultural functions; and no longer is any single model for it considered plausible. As noted earlier, the architectural competition for the Tampere City Library in 1978 was a turning point in the architectural discourse. The same can be said of the librarianship discourse, as similar expressions and rhetoric were subsequently used by the librarians too. The wider cultural meanings of the library building have ever since been an essential aspect of the librarianship discourse. One explanation for the absence of a coherent agenda on library buildings among librarians is perhaps now the absence of reasons for this. The 1980s was the heyday of building new libraries in Finland and, despite the economic depression at the beginning of the 1990s, many public architectural competitions have been held for new public libraries, most of which have actually been constructed.<sup>27</sup> The preplanning of libraries has become a more standardized activity, and librarians' part in the planning and design process of libraries more officially established.

Nor has there been marked uniformity in the presentations of the library buildings. This is especially true of the form of the articles when the publishing of annual surveys was, for some reason,



discontinued in *The Finnish Library Journal* after 1982. Since then there have been sporadic presentations of individual libraries; sometimes also various joint presentations of several new library buildings in the same article. The importance of the photographs has gradually increased, especially after the shift to color in 1996. This development can also be detected in the presentations of the new library buildings where the use of images has become essential.

The Tampere City Library (**Figure 4**), designed by the architect Reima Pietilä and completed in 1986, is one of the most iconic library buildings in the Finnish context in recent decades.<sup>28</sup> The architectural competition for Tampere City Library in 1978 was clearly a turning point in the Finnish discourse on library architecture, after which the wider cultural and aesthetic characteristics of library buildings have been recognized in discussions.

The architecture of the Tampere City Library is highly expressive and welcomes individual users' differing interpretations. The expressive, metaphorical character of the library is further established by the fact that the Tampere City Library is one of the few public libraries in Finland to have an official name; it is commonly referred to in Finnish as "Metso" (Capercaillie) as from above, the shape of the library resembles a giant, abstract sculpture of a male capercaillie (wood grouse) fanning out his tail feathers. Pietilä divulged the quasi-mythological origins behind the design process of the library and has always been interested in widening the scope of architectural design by various philosophical, metaphorical, and conceptual approaches to the design problem at hand. While the architectural expression of the Tampere City Library is consciously self-assertive and the building is essentially a fixed function library, it is designed to be practical and the design was executed with librarians' cooperation (Martikainen, 1989). The Tampere City Library was immediately recognized as an exceptional building among Finnish librarians too. Its architectural expression was hailed as unique and "daring," and the library's value as a cultural landmark for the city of Tampere was proclaimed. In a sense, it soon came to be regarded as a flagship of Finnish library architecture. However, the Tampere City Library has been a somewhat controversial building and it has also been criticized by some librarians, for example, for being a fixed function library (Aaltonen, 2009, p. 585).

The new extension to the Turku City Library (**Figure 5**) is an intriguing example of the options for expanding and renovating existing library buildings.<sup>29</sup> The renovation of existing libraries and the conversion of other buildings have gradually become more important, although are somewhat rare in Finland.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the 1950s, this has not been primarily due to economic necessity, but to other reasons, with the underlying cultural and historical values significant in such projects. The Turku City Library is also a good example of how unpredictable the building process of a public library can be. It can take years to build a public library in Finland. Local, political consensus on the matter must be first reached, which may take a long time, and even after that fluctuating economic situations may prolong the matter seemingly indefinitely.

In the case of Turku, an architectural competition was organized in 1999 after several years of preplanning, but the new extension of the library was not opened until 2007. Here, however, the delay proved to be beneficial. In the original competition, the site chosen for the new addition was situated across the street from the old library. The different parts of the library were planned to be connected by an underground tunnel. These situational and contextual prerequisites produced architectural solutions that not only emphasized the differentiation and detachment of the new and old parts of the library, but also paid little attention to the overall urban milieu. Even the old wooden building on the site was doomed to demolition by the official rules of the competition.

After the competition, the building process was discontinued for years, and by chance, along with the actions of the city officials, the building site was replaced by the existing one. A whole new plan was made by the young Finnish architecture firm JKMM Architects which had won the original competition, as the new site made possible a much more convenient connection between the new and old parts of the library. The existing library now consists of new and old buildings, all located on the same city block, actively creating urban, historically multilayered public space that has few rivals in the context of Finnish public libraries.

## Conclusion

The history of public library buildings in Finland from 1945 to the present was analyzed in this article by examining the Finnish architectural and librarianship discourses on the subjects of library planning

and design. The research material chosen, the Finnish architects' journal *Arkkitehti* and the Finnish librarians' journal *Kirjastolehti*, provided, due to the national status of the journals, a valuable source for outlining the general history of public library buildings in Finland. It is possible to detect the most essential, historically changing themes of the architectural and librarianship discourses through this material. Besides offering a means for such a general analysis, the material enables the construction of a contextual framework for the further interpretation of individual library buildings. In this article, five representative library buildings from different decades were chosen for closer analysis.

The Finnish architectural discourse on library architecture and the way the library buildings were presented in the Finnish architects' journal *Arkkitehti* remained quite constant throughout the research material. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, most of the examples of public library buildings presented in the journal *Arkkitehti* were after 1980. In the Finnish context, this has meant that a general conceptual and functional framework for the public library had been established. The task remaining for the architects was then merely to design the proper aesthetic and architectural form in accordance with the given brief.

Secondly, for the architects, the public library was in many ways just one building type among others. The specific discourse on library architecture was thus largely determined by the overall changes in the general discourse on Finnish architecture. Furthermore, the wider representational conventions of an architectural publication, as a distinct genre, determined how the library buildings were presented in the journal *Arkkitehti*.

The decisive influence of the public architectural competitions is a third fact that should be noted in the Finnish context. Almost all the public libraries presented in the journal *Arkkitehti* resulted from such competitions. It can be assumed that in many cases this furthered the pursuit of architectural uniqueness in the physical solutions of the library buildings. However, inherent in the self-reflection of modern Finnish architecture, as a part of Scandinavian modernism, is a strong emphasis on the balance between aesthetic and functional design principles. This emphasis was also apparent in the Finnish architects' discourse on library architecture throughout the research material.

In the Finnish librarianship discourse, the question of library architecture was an important and widely discussed issue. Not surprisingly, the practical demands of library work have largely guided the Finnish librarians' discourse on library planning and design in their journal *Kirjastolehti*. However, the librarians' concern about the characteristics of library buildings has not merely been a pragmatic reaction to a prevailing situation, but in many cases also more progressive and future-oriented. During the twentieth century, there were some distinct time periods when librarians actively struggled to renew the dominant concept of the public library building in the Finnish context. For Finnish librarians, a key question has always been how to best gain recognition for their professional knowledge in the process of planning libraries.

Beside the more prosaic, practical side of library buildings, Finnish librarians have also always been interested in other aspects of library architecture. Immediately after World War II, the comfort and beauty of library facilities were much appreciated by librarians. In the librarianship discourse these attributes were firmly linked to an idea that suitable library premises were one of the most concrete and direct ways of raising the prestige of the library institution. In more recent times, as library projects have become more elaborate and diverse, the wider notions of the symbolic, cultural, and historical values of library buildings have been acknowledged among Finnish librarians.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The list of references given in this note is by no means comprehensive. The chosen works represent various approaches to the study of library architecture in different contexts. In the Finnish context, see Sievänen-Allen (1989) on the origins of the open plan in Finnish library architecture before 1940. The ideals of the open plan were imported directly from the United States and also through the other Nordic countries by certain active Finnish librarians. In practice, however, librarians were able to realize these ideals only partly in the libraries built in Finland. In the Scandinavian context, see Dahlkild (2007) on the history of public library buildings in Denmark in the early part of the twentieth century. If one compares the findings of Dahlkild with the study by Sievänen-Allen, it is clear that the history of public library architecture has been very similar in the various Nordic countries. However, during this time period considerably more public libraries were built in Denmark than in Finland and the library architecture was more elaborate. It was only after World War II, more precisely from the 1960s onward, that Finland has been able to gradually catch up with Denmark and Sweden in the quality and quantity of libraries constructed. In the Anglo-American context, see for example Black, Pepper & Bagshaw (2009), Van Slyck (1995), and Mattern (2007). Black, Pepper & Bagshaw have provided a comprehensive history of public library buildings in Britain in 1850–1939. Van Slyck has studied the history of Carnegie libraries in the United States, combining in an exemplary fashion the various sociological, historical, and cultural aspects of libraries. Mattern (2007) provides a detailed presentation of the contemporary discourse on library architecture in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the history of library architecture in Finland has been covered to some extent. Excellent introductions to the topic are Aaltonen & Carlson (1986) and Aaltonen (2009). The book by Aaltonen & Carlson offers a basic introduction to the history of library architecture in Finland. The more recent, extensive, and richly illustrated article by Aaltonen is a solidly documented historical overview of public library architecture in Finland and the most comprehensive presentation ever published on the subject. The article by Aaltonen has been an important source and an excellent reference point for this study.

<sup>3</sup> The periodization of history is always problematic. Nevertheless, it makes sense to divide the history of Finnish public library buildings into two periods: before and after World War II. Very few purpose-built public libraries were constructed in the early part of the twentieth century in Finland; and all were built with substantial help from private donations. Practically all the public library buildings in use in Finland today were constructed after 1945. The history of Finnish library architecture in the early part of the twentieth century is best covered in Sievänen-Allen (1989) and Aaltonen (2009).

<sup>4</sup> This approach contrasts with that of Aaltonen (2009), who offers an exhaustive presentation of the general history of public library buildings in Finland. This article attempts a closer analysis of the Finnish architectural and librarianship discourses on library design and to make these accessible to the foreign reader.

<sup>5</sup> Problems of reconstruction, in terms of housing especially, were acute after the war. The quality of Finnish architecture in the 1950s has been internationally acknowledged. See, for example, Koho (2000, pp. 91–95) or Quantrill (1995), who goes as far as to call this period in Finnish architecture “a second Finnish renaissance.”

<sup>6</sup> Some examples of this rather emotional and colorful librarianship discourse in *The Finnish Library Review* were, for instance: “We can no longer be contented with the idea that the treasures of the spirit, books, are being stored in gloomy, repulsive shacks” (*Kirjastolehti* 1950, p. 196), and “A library that looks like a stable cannot make a demand that its books should be handled as the crown jewels” (*Kirjastolehti* 1951, p. 8).

<sup>7</sup> Eskola (2009, pp. 298–300) examines the situation in the rural areas in the 1930s. It is clear that the

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situation remained unchanged after the war and improved only gradually during the 1950s. The concern about the standard of the services in the rural areas persisted in Finnish librarianship discourse until the 1970s. See Aaltonen (2009) on the general situation after the war.

<sup>8</sup> *Kirjastolehti* was then still called *Kansanvalistus ja Kirjastolehti* which could be translated into English as *Journal on Popular Education and Libraries*. See also Aaltonen (2009, pp. 541–543) about the role of Mauno Kanninen.

<sup>9</sup> The influences from the United States on Finnish library work and library architecture in the early part of the twentieth century are best covered in Sievänen-Allen (1989), Vatanen (2002), and Vatanen (2009). As noted, the main reference point for Finnish librarians after World War II was the example of other Nordic countries. Nonetheless, the idea of flexibility and the use of the open plan in architecture generally, as in the construction of shopping centers and office buildings, originated in the United States. In Finnish architecture, the work by Viljo Revel, for instance, was influenced by these American ideals as early as the 1950s. See, for example, Quantrill (1995).

<sup>10</sup> Kanninen (1953) offers an illustrated presentation of contemporary library premises, and buildings in Finland and includes a basic guide for library planning and design.

<sup>11</sup> See Mäkinen (2009, pp. 361–366) on the gradual change in the library services for children and young people in Finland during the 1950s.

<sup>12</sup> Lauritsala was a small village of about 10,000 people. The Lauritsala Public Library was covered in *Arkkitiehti* 9–10/1951 and in *Kirjastolehti* 1951, pp. 172–176. As Aaltonen (2009, p. 543) notes, the investment in such an eminent public library building in such a small place at that time is best explained by the prosperity provided by the local wood industry. A similar situation prevailed in Säynätsalo, where the public library was a part of the architecturally famous Säynätsalo Town Hall, designed by Alvar Aalto.

<sup>13</sup> The only published works on the work of Martta and Ragnar Ypyä are Makkonen (1998) and Makkonen (1999). See, for example, Makkonen (1999, p. 173) on the wall decorations in the Lauritsala Public Library, which were executed by Ragnar Ypyä and the artist Lars-Gunnar Nordström.

<sup>14</sup> The town of Rovaniemi is the capital of the northernmost part of Finland, Lapland. In the mid-1960s the town was inhabited by a population of about 20,000 people. The Rovaniemi City Library was covered in *Arkkitiehti* 2/1968 and in *Kirjastolehti* 1966, pp. 67–72. Although the literature on the work of Alvar Aalto is voluminous, the presentations of library buildings have not been an essential part of it. Of all the Aalto libraries, the Viipuri Library has perhaps been covered best.

<sup>15</sup> After World War II, the town of Viipuri (sometimes called Vyborg in English) was ceded, and remained a permanent part of the Soviet Union; and is now part of Russia. After the war the Viipuri Library was quite forgotten in Finland as it was situated on the other side of the border. It was only in the 1980s that its value was reacknowledged, especially after some projects for its restoration were started with financial assistance from Finland. The renovation of the library is ongoing, and the work is best described in Adlercreutz, Englund, Kairamo, Mustonen & Nava (2009), which also gives basic historical background information on the building.

<sup>16</sup> The split-level floor solution had perhaps its finest realization in the library of the Mount Angel Abbey, in Oregon. In a brief but informative study on the building Jormakka (1999, p.123) stated eloquently: “The Mount Angel Library not only partakes in the mystique of the book but constructs an appropriately heterotopic environment for the act of reading: the procession to the windowless book pit suggests descent into a subterranean grave, silent and removed from human life.”

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Hirn (1978, p. 13) complaining about such solutions in Finnish public libraries: “there is an unfortunate amount of verticality ... Primary attention has been focused upon overall visual impressions at the expense of other functions.”

<sup>18</sup> See for example Black, Pepper & Bagshaw (2009, pp. 276–281) on the pursuit of utility and efficiency in early public library architecture in Britain.

<sup>19</sup> Of note here is Vaughan (1979) on academic library buildings in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the context was in many ways different, it is noteworthy that Vaughan states that the use of modular or flexible principles “came in with a rush” in Britain.

<sup>20</sup> The best analysis of the post-war Finnish architectural discourse is provided by von Bonsdorff (1991). Von Bonsdorff defined three different modes of architectural discourse, which can be translated into English as the discourses of “absolute architecture,” “the architecture of functionality,” and “the architecture of relevance.” According to von Bonsdorff (1991, pp. 52–71), the 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of the discourse of “the architecture of functionality.”

<sup>21</sup> The Danish study to which Junnila refers is Plovgaard (1967) which provides a fairly detailed presentation of the design principles of small and medium sized public libraries with examples of dimensioning and some schematic type plans. Junnila was most impressed by the thorough, methodical presentation and it was just this new kind of more professional attitude, based on empirical study, he claimed, that was also needed in Finland.

<sup>22</sup> Hirn (1978, p.14) commented, for example, on the importance of the preplanning stages for eliminating “chance errors.” He pointed out also that in recent architectural competitions substantial information about the basic requirements of library buildings had been provided for participants.

<sup>23</sup> The town of Kouvola had then a population of about 30,000 people. The Kouvola City Library was covered in *Arkkituuri* 6/1969, in English as *Architectural Competitions in Finland*, a separate enclosure of *The Finnish Architectural Review*, and in *Kirjasto* 1970, pp. 400–403. The building was much appreciated by librarians for its practicality. See, for example, Hirn (1978, p. 14) who emphasized that the “reminder given us by the Kouvola Library is very welcome and necessary.”

<sup>24</sup> See Mehtonen (2008, pp. 49–51) on architects’ use of aesthetic validations. Such discourse is seen as based partly on an idealized view of both the architect’s work and architects’ approaches architectural design as an autonomous realm.

<sup>25</sup> See Mehtonen (2008, pp. 37–48) on the architects’ use of the concept of cityscape in the context of library design, and Koho (1996, pp. 23–31) on the use of the concept in Finnish architecture in general.

<sup>26</sup> According to von Bonsdorff (1991, pp. 71–102), the predominant mode in Finnish architectural discourse from the end of the 1970s to the 1980s was the discourse of “the architecture of relevance,” the discussion on the meaning and relevance of architecture. The changes in Finland were influenced by the events in the international architectural discourse, for example, by the emergence of postmodernism. See, for instance, Koho (1996).

<sup>27</sup> About three times as many presentations (just over thirty) of public libraries or architectural competitions for them were published in *The Finnish Architectural Review* after 1980 than in 1945–1979. Aaltonen (2009, p. 580) states that during the 1980s over two hundred public libraries were built in Finland. According to Huotelin & Kaipiainen (2006), during the 1980s more open architectural competitions were held in general than ever before in Finland and the absolute peak in the number of competitions was in 1989–1991.

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<sup>28</sup> The city of Tampere had then a population of about 170,000. The Tampere City Library was covered in *Arkkitehtuurikilpailuja* 1/1979, in *Arkkitehti* 2/1987, and in *Kirjastolehti* 9/1986. Quantrill (1985) is a standard, comprehensive introduction to the work of Reima Pietilä. Quantrill pointed out the similarities between the Tampere City Library and the “fan arrangements” of many later Aalto libraries and stated that the building “has its roots in natural forms ... but those abstracted references are skillfully interpreted, transformed and absorbed into an architectural whole” (Quantrill 1985, p. 143).

<sup>29</sup> The city of Turku currently has a population of about 175,000. The new extension to the Turku City Library was covered in *Arkkitehtuurikilpailuja* 3/1999, in *Arkkitehti* 4/2007, and in *Kirjastolehti* 1/2007. The original library building was constructed in 1903 and it was the first public library in Finland where the new, American-influenced open access system was implemented, in 1914 (Aaltonen, 2009, pp. 496–500). During the preplanning period in the mid-1990s, a special study project was organized about the future possibilities of public library buildings. The findings of the project were published in a book where Perälä (1996) stated that the previous development period in Finnish library design had its peak in the Tampere City Library and it was time to think about other solutions. Two of these new solutions, which were also realized in the constructed building, were the investment in library automation and the decision to divide the collections according the subject matter, regardless of the publication type. The later decision was based on the example provided by the project for the new extension for Malmö City Library in Sweden (Perälä 1996).

<sup>30</sup> This contrasts with the situation in Britain, where there was not only a greater number of old library buildings but also a more traditional public image of the library: see Black, Pepper & Bagshaw (2009, pp. 317–337). See also Mattern (2007, pp. 55–57) on the contemporary discourse on library architecture in the United States, where the notions of history, for example the tradition of Carnegie libraries, plays perhaps a more important role than in Finland.

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